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ABSTRACT

A study identified factors that a random sample of West Virginia nontraditional and traditional secondary vocational education completers perceived as barriers in obtaining their career goals. A survey instrument was mailed, and a sample of nonrespondents was contacted by telephone. Chi-square statistics were used for analyses. The large majority of both samples (traditional and nontraditional) liked their vocational experience, would choose the same program again, and would recommend their program to a friend. Nontraditional completers most often enrolled because the "program sounded interesting"; traditional completers chose the program because they "wanted to learn a skill." Parents supported the respondents' vocational choices, but nontraditional completers received less support and more opposition. The students themselves, vocational teachers, and parents were of most help with career choice. Students helped themselves the most for education or job placements. Over half were employed 10 months following program completion. The average mean income was higher for the traditional completers for the first and present job. The supervisor reported that they were required to do work not required of opposite sex coworkers. The majority were satisfied with their present job even though they were unhappy with salary and advancement potential. (YLB)

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NONTRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL COMPLETERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL AND WORK

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NONTRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL COMPLETERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL AND WORK

Within the last decade there has been much discussion regarding sex stereotyping, providing sex equity and allowing people to enter nontraditional careers for their sex. Historically, many vocational education programs have attracted students of only one sex. In the past several years, students have been encouraged to enroll in vocational education programs that are nontraditional for their sex. This encouragement may have resulted from the changing sex roles in society and legislative action of Congress (e.g. 1976 Educational Amendments).

Several aspects of enrollment in nontraditional programs have recently received attention. Ways to encourage students to enter nontraditional programs have been investigated by Lerner et al. (1976) and Lawson (1977). Evans (1979) identified some problems encountered by nontraditional students while enrolled in sex-type secondary education programs. In addition, other researchers have found that attitudinal barriers and problems existed for students who wanted to enroll in courses considered to be nontraditional for their sex (Greer, 1979; Rieder, 1977; Vetter et al., 1979; Weitz, 1977).

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to identify the attitudes and experiences of nontraditional and traditional completers of vocational education programs toward their school preparation and their work.

The nontraditional completers were defined as males who had completed a typically female program and females who had completed a typically male program.

The study was designed to compare and contrast the nontraditional and traditional completers regarding:

(1) factors that led to their enrolling in vocational education programs

(2) satisfaction with their school preparation

(3) support of influential individuals

(4) problems in seeking, obtaining, and keeping employment.

Methodology

The nontraditional vocational education programs were determined by using the 1980 West Virginia secondary vocational programs with 20% or less enrollment by one sex. Therefore, if the female enrollment was 20% or less, the program was identified as nontraditional female. If the male enrollment was 20% or less, the program was identified as nontraditional male. With this procedure, 53 vocational education programs in comprehensive high schools and vocational schools were identified as enrolling students in nontraditional programs and comprised the frame.

From the 53 nontraditional programs, 100 nontraditional subjects were randomly selected (N=208, 48%). For comparison purposes, 100 traditional subjects were randomly selected from the same schools and programs as the nontraditional subjects (N=1336, 7%). All vocational areas were represented in each of the nontraditional and traditional subject samples.

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher (Kendall, 1981). The questionnaire was reviewed by a five-member panel of experts to establish content validity. The questionnaire was field tested in a vocational horticulture program in which both males and females were enrolled (N=25). Internal consistency reliability coefficients were determined by the Cronbach Alpha technique for the perception of school preparation (alpha for pilot test = .49; data sample = .65), attitudes toward school (alpha = .48; data sample = .73) and perceptions of work barriers (data sample alpha = .78). A modest reliability (r=.50) will suffice when hypothesized measures of a construct are used in the early stages of research in an area (Nunnally, 1967). The questionnaire was found to be reliable.

The variable sets in the questionnaire included:

- attitudes toward school and school preparation
- reasons for enrolling in vocational education
- support or lack of support by influential individuals
- educational or job placement assistance
- job satisfaction/advancement potential
- attitudes toward work
- perceptions of work barriers
- personal characteristics.

An introductory letter was mailed to the 200 subjects ten months after their program completion from the Director of the Research Co-ordinating Unit explaining their selection, the purpose of the study, and informing them that a questionnaire was forthcoming. A cover letter, questionnaire, and postage-paid return envelope followed four days later.

The nonrespondent follow-up procedure included a second mailing and incentive. Attempts were made to locate the subjects whose letter and questionnaire were returned by the postal service as undeliverable. Telephone calls were also made to a 10% sample of the traditional and nontraditional nonrespondents to collect the data. Chi-square analysis showed no statistical difference between the nonrespondents and respondents.

Final response rates were 36% for the nontraditional sample and 42% for the traditional sample. Chi-square statistics were used for group comparisons, and the comparison-wise error rate should be considered when interpreting the results. All vocational education program areas were represented by the nontraditional and traditional respondents.

Results

Attitudes Toward School and School Preparation. Ninety-four percent of the nontraditional and 95% of the traditional completers liked their vocational education experience. The large majority of respondents indicated they had good instructors and had teachers who were interested in their progress. Also, 70% of the nontraditional and 81% of the traditional respondents would choose the same vocational program again. Slightly more would recommend their vocational program to a friend (89% and 91% respectively).

Reasons for Enrollment. Table 1 summarizes the factors that affected the vocational choice of the respondents. The most frequent responses were "program sounded interesting," "wanted to try out this field," "thought I would like the work," and "wanted to learn a skill to prepare for a job." The most frequently chosen response for the

nontraditional completers was "program sounded interesting" while the traditional completers most frequently chose the program because they "wanted to learn a skill."

Eighty-six percent of the nontraditional and 78% of the traditional completers indicated that it was appropriate for females to be encouraged to enroll in traditionally male courses. Also, 82% of the nontraditional respondents and 72% of the traditional respondents indicated that it was appropriate for males to be encouraged to take courses considered to be traditionally female.

Influencial Individuals. The majority of the nontraditional and traditional completers indicated that their parents supported their vocational choice (mother 64% and 78%, father 53% and 69% respectively). However, a larger percentage of the traditional respondents indicated support from parents than nontraditional respondents. In addition, the nontraditional respondents perceived that they received less support than the traditional respondents from the counselors, male friends and female friends.

In regard to assistance with career choice, the nontraditional and traditional completers reported "myself," the vocational teacher, and parents were of most help while they were in school (Table 2). However, the traditional completers were significantly higher than the nontraditional completers for "myself," vocational teacher, and male parent. The overall pattern is that for most of the sources a larger percentage of the traditional completers perceived receiving support than the nontraditional completers. Slightly more traditional completers than nontraditional completers indicated that counselors were of assistance to them in their career choices (28% and 20% respectively).

The vocational teachers were influential in the decision by the respondents to enroll in a vocational education program. However, once enrolled, the respondents indicated that their vocational teacher did not provide as much assistance or support as the completers wanted.

One-fourth of the nontraditional and 17% of the traditional completers indicated that they had been treated less favorably than others in their classes by their vocational education teacher. More nontraditional than traditional completers indicated that they were treated differently from others by their classmates (39% and 17% respectively).

Education or Job Placement Assistance. Sixty-three percent of the nontraditional and 75% of the traditional completers indicated that the most important person to assist them with securing their education or job placement was "myself." Others considered to be helpful were female parent, male parent, female friend, and vocational teacher (Table 3). More than twice as many traditional than nontraditional respondents indicated their vocational teacher was helpful.

More than 70% of the respondents revealed that the private employment agency, school placement service, radio/TV, and newspaper were of no help with their education or job placement (Table 3). Also, significantly more nontraditional than traditional completers indicated their guidance counselor was of no help with their education or job placement (Table 3).

In helping the respondents to find a job, slightly more than 40% indicated their vocational teacher gave information about them to employers. Also, 67% of each respondent group revealed they were taught to complete job application forms in their vocational program.

Employment and Education Status. Fifty-six percent of the non-traditional respondents and 57% of the traditional respondents were employed ten months after completing their program. However, twice as many nontraditional than traditional completers had not been employed since completing their program (28% and 12% respectively). In addition, one-third from each respondent group were looking for employment. Since the respondents could indicate more than one category, some of the respondents who were employed were also looking for a job. Furthermore, one-third of the nontraditional and traditional completers were continuing their education either full time or part time. Very few indicated they were full-time homemakers.

In the first job, traditional respondents reported a higher mean income than the nontraditional respondents ($389 and $317 respectively). The same trend continued in the reporting of mean income for their present position. Traditional respondents reported a mean income of $465, whereas nontraditional respondents reported earning a mean of $403.

Work Barriers and Satisfactions. The majority of the nontraditional and traditional completers reported that their present supervisor was interested in their progress (80% and 70% respectively). More completers were happy with the treatment by co-workers than by their supervisors' treatment (91% vs 74% nontraditional, and 94% vs 84% traditional). Fifty-nine percent of the nontraditional and 62% traditional completers perceived that they were required to do work which was not required of their opposite sex co-workers.

Forty-four percent of the nontraditional and 36% of the traditional respondents were unhappy with their salary. Slightly more nontraditional (63%) than traditional (44%) completers were unhappy with their advancement potential even though 30% of the nontraditional respondents and 22% of the traditional respondents reported that they had received a formal job advancement excluding any salary increases. In general, at least two-thirds of each respondent group were happy with the fringe benefits, company policies, facilities and equipment, working conditions, variety of work tasks required to do, safety conditions, and job security.

Forty-three percent of both respondent groups had experienced violent language while on the job (Table 4). Other behaviors encountered by the respondents were not being kept up-to-date on information, unfair ratings on work performance and difficulty getting time off. In addition, 25% of the completers revealed they had experienced insults or innuendos after completing their vocational education program.

From this research it is evident that a number of work barriers exist in the job environment. Despite these barriers, 73% of the nontraditional respondents and 76% of the traditional respondents reported they were satisfied in their present job.

Personal Characteristics. The respondents revealed that their parents held a variety of occupations. The majority of reported occupations were stereotypic for both mother and father. Housewife was the most frequently reported occupation for the mothers. Self-employed, coal miner, and foreman were the most frequently reported occupations for the fathers.

Conclusions and Implications

The study identified factors that nontraditional and traditional completers of secondary vocational education programs perceived as barriers in obtaining their vocational career goals and compared the two groups. The factors examined were: attitudes toward school and school preparation, reasons for enrolling in vocational education, impact of influential individuals, education or job placement assistance, employment and education status, and work barriers and satisfactions. The findings identified potential problems for secondary students entering vocational programs considered nontraditional for their sex.

The nontraditional and traditional completers had highly positive attitudes toward their vocational education program. The vocational teachers were helpful in the decisions by the completers to enroll in the vocational program. However, once enrolled, the completers indicated the teacher did not provide as much support or assistance as they wanted. More nontraditional than traditional respondents perceived they had been treated differently from others by their vocational teacher. Vocational teachers may need to be made more aware of their actions. Perhaps the teachers do not realize that they are treating the nontraditional students differently.

This research supports the findings of other researchers where teachers have been criticized for treating students differently based on their sex. The differential treatment included rewarding and punishing males and females differently (Lewis & Kaltreider, 1976; Spaulding, 1963).

Regarding the reasons for enrolling in the vocational education program, the nontraditional completers perceived their vocational education experience as being less valuable for personal use or as a means for obtaining a good job than traditional completers. More nontraditional completers chose their program because it sounded interesting, while traditional completers more frequently chose their program because they wanted to learn a skill. Apparently, the traditional respondents chose their vocational education program for more varied reasons than the nontraditional respondents.

The impact of influential others was perceived as less helpful and supportive by the nontraditional completers. However, parents were influential in the career choice for both groups of respondents. This concurs with the findings of McLaughlin et al. (1976) and Penn and Gabriel (1976). However, this current study revealed that male parents were not as helpful for the nontraditional respondents. Penn and Gabriel (1976) reported that the negative aspects of parental influence were reported mostly by females who wanted to pursue nontraditional careers. The friends of the completers were more likely to support traditional choices than nontraditional choices.

A large percentage of the completers indicated that guidance counselors were of little or no help to them in securing educational or job placement before completing the program. This research concurs with the findings that students encountered problems by going to guidance counselors, particularly if the students wanted to enroll in a nontraditional course or program (Evans, 1979; Lewis & Kaltreider, 1976; Lehmann, 1977). Perhaps students need to be aware of the services

counselors can offer. In addition, counselors may need to explain to the students the assistance and services available to them.

More than half of the nontraditional and traditional respondents were employed ten months after completing their program. Less than 30% had not been employed since their program completion. One-third of the respondents were continuing their education either full time or part time. Efforts are needed to identify reasons why the students who wished to obtain employment remained unemployed.

More barriers are perceived to exist for the nontraditional respondents in the work environment than the traditional respondents. These included violent language, salary differentiation, doing work their counterparts didn't have to do, unfair ratings in work performance and not being kept up-to-date. Perhaps employers may need to be made aware of their overt and covert actions and the assigning of work responsibilities.

The respondents were unhappy with their advancement potential and salary. This may be an area to be addressed by vocational teachers, whereby educators must stress that promotions take time and good work. However, both respondent groups revealed that their supervisor was interested in their progress. In addition, they were happy with the treatment by their supervisor and co-workers.

Inasmuch as students have a choice of vocational education programs, it is evident that school-related problems and employment barriers do exist for students. The problems and barriers which have been outlined are stronger for the students selecting nontraditional programs. As a result, our goal of substantial and widespread nontraditional enrollment

is being hampered. We, as educators, must take the first step by assessing the attitudes of students, classmates, potential employers and fellow educators toward students pursuing nontraditional careers. We must begin NOW. I strongly urge action to be taken so that this select group of students can succeed in both nontraditional education and caree- paths.

Table 1

Factors Influencing Nontraditional and Traditional Respondents to Select Vocational Education Program

Factors	Nontraditional %	Traditional %
Program sounded interesting	81	76
Wanted to try out this field	78	76
Thought I would like the work	75	68
Wanted to learn a skill	67	81
Jobs available in this field	50	71
Recommended by people	47	46
Good at this kind of work	47	66
Wanted it for personal use	39	63**
Good job with a good income	33	61*
Did not want to go to college	19	20
Could not afford college	14	12
No other interesting program open	14	15
Friends were taking program	14	15
Wanted to work in parent's business in this field	8	12
Counselor convinced me to take it	6	27*
Parents convinced me to take it	6	17
Wanted to leave my school	3	5
Don't know	3	5

* $p < .05$, chi square
** $p < .10$, chi square

Table 2

Helpfulness with Career Choice while Completers Were in High School

Influential Individuals	Much Help	
	Nontraditional %	Traditional %
Myself	63	81**
Vocational Teacher	44	79*
Female Parent	37	61[a]
Male Parent	33	64**
Male Friend	23	38
Female Friend	23	31
Nonvocational Teacher	23	32
Guidance Counselor	20	28
Former Vocational Student	18	24
Co-Op Employer	17	38[b]
Co-Op Coordinator	10	20

* $p < .01$, chi square
** $p < .05$, chi square

[a] $p < .11$, chi square
[b] $p < .17$, chi square

Note: The data are condensed from larger tables. This condensation results in reporting figures which are statistically significant due to data not included on this table.

Table 3

Sources Considered of Much Help or No Help in Securing Educational or Job Placement

Sources Offering Much Help	Nontraditional %	Traditional %
Myself	63	75*[a]
Female Parent	28	56**
Male Parent	24	53**
Female Friend	23	27
Co-op Employer	22	18
Vocational Teacher	20	45**
Non-vocational Teacher	12	19
Former Vocational Student	8	14
Male Friend	4	29*
Sources Offering No Help		
Private Employment Agency	96	83
School Placement Service	92	73
Radio/TV	87	89
Newspaper	83	76
Guidance Counselor	76	46**

* $p < .05$, chi square
** $p < .10$, chi square

[a] A significant difference appeared in the Some and No Help category for myself ($p < .05$).

Table 4

Behaviors Experienced by Nontraditional/Traditional Respondents After Completing their Vocational Program

Behaviors	Nontraditional %	Traditional %
Violent language	43	43
Not being kept up-to-date on information	43	36
Unfair ratings on your work performance	32	39
Difficulty getting time off	29	39
Insults/Innuendos	25	25
Unusual assignments or extra work	21	18
Dirty tricks	18	21
Denied Breaks	14	29
Unfair ratings on your personal conduct at work	14	29
Sexual discrimination	14	11
Being passed over for promotion in favor of opposite sex person	14	25
Threats of firing or transfer	14	25
Racial discrimination	11	14
False reports on your work performance	11	29
Physical violence	7	18
Mandatory overtime	7	21
Denied time off for family illness	7	14
Unfair ratings on your personal conduct outside of the work setting	4	21

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